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NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION MODELS
AND THE NATO ENLARGEMENT DEBATE

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NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION MODELS
AND THE NATO ENLARGEMENT DEBATE

On April 30, 1998, culminating prolonged discussion and debate within the Clinton administration and in the broader public, the United States Senate voted to support the admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The decision to welcome those former members of the Warsaw Pact was one of the most far-reaching policy developments in the history of the Atlantic Alliance. As such, it was highly controversial, enjoying at first only a limited natural constituency, and opposed by some of the most prominent figures in the foreign policy elite. Nevertheless, the Protocols of Accession of the three candidate members were ratified by an 80-19 vote, a commanding four-to-one margin. How did advocates of NATO enlargement carry the day on such a profoundly contentious issue?

Core Course 5603 discusses various models for analyzing how national security strategy decisions are made, and the NATO enlargement question illustrates strengths and weaknesses of those approaches. Even without the cables and memoranda that will be declassified in the future, public record materials and other unclassified sources demonstrate how, with sufficient time, methodical planning and, above all, a nuanced appreciation of politics, support may be generated for an important policy initiative. Each of the decision-making models has its usefulness and helps explain certain aspects of NATO enlargement issue. The *bureaucratic politics* framework--the classic "Where you stand depends on where you sit" formulation--supports perhaps the most numerous examples. Bureaucracies, however, are staffed with individuals. Consequently, the *psychological* model, which addresses this human dimension and the motivations that

other models do not, is also essential to understand how the NATO enlargement decision came about

Before discussing the models, however, a brief overview of the course of the NATO debate and the composition of the opposing camps is useful. The issue unfolded as “a drama in three acts” 1) the controversy within the Clinton administration over alliance expansion as a policy, which the President settled with his January 1994 declaration that NATO enlargement was a question of when and how, not if, 2) the push to set a timetable for inviting new members, which Clinton in October 1996 promised would occur the following year, and 3) the battle to win ratification of NATO expansion¹. The first act included the introduction of the “Partnership for Peace” (PfP), which the Clinton administration portrayed as a transition mechanism to help the new democracies of the former Warsaw Pact (plus any interested neutral countries) forge closer ties with the Atlantic Alliance. Some supporters of NATO enlargement, however, feared that PfP was designed as an alternative to full membership, a halfway house from which alliance aspirants would never be permitted to emerge.

Both advocates and opponents of alliance enlargement formed heterogeneous coalitions that nevertheless shared a number of similarities. Each side could invoke eminent foreign policy experts in support of its views. George Kennan, John Gaddis, and Jack Matlock warning that NATO expansion was, in Kennan’s words, “a fateful error”, Madeline Albright, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Henry Kissinger promising that the admission of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to NATO would greatly enhance

¹ Jan Nowak-Jezioranski, “Za kulisami rozszerzania NATO,” *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw) 13, 20 June 1998, available from <http://www.rzeczpospolita.pl/>, Internet, accessed 1 December 1998

transatlantic security² Each side could count both Democratic and Republican senators among its allies and cite the editorial pages of major newspapers as adherents to the cause Each side could produce data documenting the (astronomical or modest, depending) cost of taking on new allies and polls demonstrating that a majority of Americans shared its views on NATO expansion

Nevertheless, while each side's roster included some unexpected elements, the opponents of NATO expansion epitomized the maxim of politics making strange bedfellows In a 1996 article in *Foreign Affairs*, Jeremy Rosner accurately predicted that the same triangle of isolationists, defense hawks, and liberal internationalists who opposed the original North Atlantic Treaty in 1949 would re-emerge to fight NATO enlargement³ Organizations ordinarily separated by an ideological chasm--Americans for Democratic Action, the Council For a Livable World, Peace Action and others on the one side, the Free Congress Foundation, the Center for Defense Information, the Eagle Forum *et alios* on the other--formed, late in the debate, the Coalition Against NATO Expansion

Advocates of the admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO included parties whose interest in the cause was not self-evident the American Jewish Committee, the U S Conference of Mayors, the AFL-CIO To no one's surprise, however, Central and East Europeans--both political leaders and diplomats from "the old country" and ethnic organizations in the United States--were among the most energetic supporters of NATO expansion Their role proved to be crucial

²It is not a coincidence that three foreign-born foreign policy scholars whose own life courses were very directly affected by World War II and the Cold War should emerge as some of the most committed advocates of NATO enlargement, see the *psychological model* discussed below

Block B, Topic 3 of Core Course 5603 introduces students to four models through which they might analyze national security decision-making 1) the *rational actor* model, 2) the *operational process* model, 3) the *bureaucratic politics* model, and 4) the *psychological* model ⁴ Those models, in that approximate order of ascending utility, help clarify the course of the debate on NATO expansion

The *rational actor* model assumes that a government produces rational decisions in the furtherance of well-defined goals ⁵ The model posits an objective weighing of the pros and cons of an issue, framing the arguments on the simultaneously noble and pragmatic plane of the national interest Those who have held positions of responsibility in the United States government, however, will recognize how little that model accounts for the way in which policies are actually made Certainly, during debates within the Clinton administration and, more obviously, in testimony, op-ed pieces, and other materials for public consumption, advocates of NATO expansion sought to portray that policy as the inevitable conclusion of just such a process of rational decision-making Opponents likewise linked their arguments to a cool, clear assessment of the national interest All the same, the *rational actor* model fails to do justice to complex bureaucratic and human nature realities underlying the NATO enlargement debate

As the name suggests, the *operational process* model views the way in which organizations do things as a key determinant in *what* gets done or attempted How and

³Jeremy Rosner, "NATO Enlargement's American Hurdle The Perils of Misjudging Our National Will," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1996, 15

⁴A fifth model, the *economic* model, is also briefly covered in 5603 While economic issues--primarily, the costs of taking on new members--were not absent from the NATO enlargement debate, the economic model focuses on comparative merits of centralized and *ad hoc* structures for reaching economic policy decisions The model therefore does not lend itself to analyzing NATO expansion

⁵For the characterization of this and other decision-making models, I am indebted to Dr Charles Stevenson of the National War College faculty who lectured on these analytical tools on November 13, 1998

when something occurs is a factor of getting one's policy ducks in a row, success hinges on thorough preparation and accurate timing. Some advocates of NATO expansion did not initially appreciate this, with Polish officials unrealistically requesting in August 1991 and August 1993 Poland's accelerated admission to the Atlantic Alliance.⁶ In addition, the Clinton administration's track record on ambitious, controversial initiatives--defeat on health care, down-to-the-wire uncertainty over the fate of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement--did not augur favorably for the prospects for NATO enlargement.

In this instance, however, supporters of alliance expansion learned lessons from past campaigns and took steps to increase their odds of success. Within the State Department, the Clinton administration established the NATO Enlargement Ratification Office, headed by the aforementioned Jeremy Rosner, who answered directly to Secretary Albright. Its task was to mobilize, expand, and solidify support for alliance expansion, and, as Dana Milbank notes in a May 25, 1998 article in *The New Republic*, the group left no stone unturned.⁷ Rosner and others lobbied disparate organizations, generated faxes and fact sheets, set up meetings for editorial boards, wooed skeptics (including President Carter), and took the case for NATO enlargement to the heartland through public speaking and broadcast appearances.

Essential to a successful outcome was close coordination with Congress, where a number of senators had been advocating alliance expansion well before it became administration policy. In 1997 Senators Joseph Biden and William Roth took the lead in

⁶Stanislaw Sirwek, a senior adviser to President Walesa, issued the former request to Ambassador Thomas W. Simons in August 1991, during the first day of the Communist putsch in Moscow. Maciej Kozlowski, Charge d'Affaires at the Polish Embassy in Washington, delivered the latter request to the Department of State in August 1993, following President Yeltsin's seeming (and short-lived) acquiescence to Polish NATO membership. The author took part in both meetings.

⁷Dana Milbank, "WHITE HOUSE WATCH: SNOG JOB," *The New Republic*, 25 May 1998, 14-

establishing a Senate NATO Observers' Group to examine, and answer colleagues' questions regarding, NATO enlargement. To undercut accusations that the issue was insufficiently discussed, supporters of alliance expansion made the tactical decision to give opponents of the policy ample opportunity to air their views.⁸ To that end, the Senate held numerous hearings, primarily in the Foreign Relations Committee, but also in the Armed Services and Intelligence Committees, to discuss various aspects of NATO enlargement. The SFRC even scheduled an "open mike" hearing, for which interested members of the public could sign up to express their opinions. NATO enlargement advocates also devoted great care to the drafting of the SFRC Report accompanying the Protocols of Accession, ensuring that that comparatively detailed document addressed as many concerns as possible regarding alliance expansion. The lopsided 80-19 Senate vote in favor of Polish, Hungarian, and Czech NATO membership confirms the *operational process* model's thesis linking methodical preparation and favorable outcome.

Many people who have not studied the *bureaucratic politics* model nevertheless know the memorable phrase in which political science scholar Graham T. Allison encapsulated its key premise: "Where you stand depends on where you sit." Under this model, there is strong connection between a policy player's affiliations--organizational, partisan, other--and the positions that person is likely to adopt. Institutions and individuals have goals and stakes, who has access to which action channels affects outcomes, and each decision point is a new contest.

The NATO enlargement debate offers numerous examples of the *bureaucratic politics* model in action. Within the Department of Defense, opposition to NATO

⁸Michael Haltzel, remarks to Seminar E, author's notes, Washington, D.C., 3 December 1998.

expansion originated in a range of concerns. Some feared the weakening of the existing Atlantic Alliance, some questioned the military readiness of the would-be members, some predicted that the American taxpayer in general, and the Defense Department budget in particular, would end up shouldering the costs of NATO membership for Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Wariness about a redefined NATO mission and the prospect of taking on new Bosnia-style missions were recurrent themes. Some opponents of alliance expansion even claimed that the candidate members were themselves potential hotspots.⁹

Though both men possessed significant experience in Central and Eastern Europe, George Kennan and Jack Matlock viewed NATO expansion from a Russian perspective and found it destabilizing.¹⁰ Other opponents on what might loosely be described as “the left,” such as *The Nation* and ice cream magnate Ben Cohen of Ben & Jerry’s, contended that the “peace dividend” proclaimed after the demise of the Warsaw Pact should be spent on domestic needs, not NATO expansion.¹¹ They too were more attuned to the sensitivities in Russia than in Central Europe.

Supporters of NATO enlargement recognized its value as a means to court ethnic voters in election years. The Republicans’ 1994 Contract With America advocated alliance enlargement. Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole, whose foreign policy team included Ukrainian-American former NSC staffer Paula Dobriansky, called for

⁹In a letter published in the March 26, 1998 *New York Review of Books*, U.S. Ambassador to Poland Daniel Fried characterized this argument as “the ‘Bosnianization’ of Central Europe: the baseless projection of the most salient failure in the post-Communist world on the most successful new democracies.”

¹⁰Prompting the Secretary of State to ask the pointed question “why some people cannot discuss the future of Central Europe without immediately changing the subject to Russia.” Madeline K. Albright, “Stop Worrying About Russia,” *New York Times* 29 April 1998, A25.

¹¹Ethnic organizations responded in a quintessentially American fashion, by urging a boycott of Ben & Jerry’s.

Polish membership in NATO by 1998 President Clinton responded with an October 1996 speech in Detroit (no accident, that setting), where he promised that invitations to join NATO would be issued the following year Even so, the *bureaucratic model* is not an infallible predictor of a politician's position Senators Paul Simon and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who both represented states with substantial Central European ethnic populations, were on opposite sides of the debate, whereas one of the most energetic advocates of NATO enlargement, Senator Hank Brown, represented a state with a negligible Central European ethnic electorate

Trade unions' support for alliance enlargement reflected their profound respect for the opinions of Solidarity, as well as the views of their not inconsiderable ethnic membership Other Central and East European ethnics made common cause with their Polish, Czech, and Hungarian counterparts on the issue, recognizing that, without a first round of NATO expansion, there would never be a second round

Still, to understand fully the crucial role of Central and East Europeans, one must also employ the prism of the *psychological model*, which best accounts for group values, the power of analogies, and the idiosyncrasies of individuals' motivations Ethnics were by no means the only ones subject to such factors For some inveterate Cold Warriors, such as Cap Weinberger and the VFW, Russian disapproval strengthened the case for alliance expansion ¹² President Clinton was reportedly influenced strongly by the pleas for NATO enlargement that Presidents Havel and Walesa delivered while in Washington for the April 1993 dedication of the Holocaust Museum ¹³ The two charismatic Central

¹²Office of the Special Advisor to the President and the Secretary of State for NATO Enlargement Ratification. 'A Selection of Recent Editorials on NATO Enlargement.' Washington, D C. undated

¹³Jan Nowak interview with the author, author's notes, Annandale, Va 29 November 1998

Europeans reiterated that message in January 1994 in Prague, where President Clinton announced that an expanded NATO was a question of when and how, not if

In his *Foreign Affairs* article, Rosner correctly anticipated that the general public's low level of interest in the issue would leave more room for ethnic voters to influence the NATO enlargement debate¹⁴ Historical memory is vivid for many of Central or East European descent, the past still lives, and references to Munich, 1956, 1968, and, above all, Yalta resonate powerfully Advocates of alliance expansion made skilful use of this At their initiative, for example, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak wrote a column charging that the Clinton administration had given Moscow a veto over East European entry into NATO¹⁵ The November 18, 1993 column "Ghost of Yalta," with the talismanic synonym for betrayal in its title, triggered an avalanche of letters and phone calls to the White House, the Departments of State and Defense, and the Congress

The different decision-making models yield different explanations for the metamorphosis of Strobe Talbott from opponent of alliance expansion to "the most eloquent spokesman for NATO enlargement in the administration"¹⁶ The *bureaucratic politics* model might posit that, as Talbott's responsibilities changed--from Special Coordinator for the former Soviet Union to Deputy Secretary of State--so too did his perspective on the NATO enlargement issue

In a June 13, 1998 interview in the Polish daily *Rzeczpospolita*, Talbott explained his change of views through a combination of the *rational actor* and the *operational process* models He at first saw no purpose to NATO enlargement other than the

¹⁴Rosner, 13

¹⁵Nowak

¹⁶Nowak-Jezioranski, *Rzeczpospolita* 13 June 1998 Author's translation from the Polish

intimidation of Russia. But opponents of alliance expansion had no argument, Talbott said, other than Russian displeasure, and this he rejected. It was necessary, he concluded, to find a way both to bring new members into NATO *and* foster closer ties between Russia and the Atlantic Alliance. The example of Russia, Central European states and NATO cooperating in Bosnia made this possible, Talbott averred.¹⁷

For those who see Talbott's personal friendship with President Clinton as key, the *psychological model* offers the most compelling explanation. Many ethnics initially viewed Talbott as a Russophile whose close ties to the President enabled him to protect Moscow's interests and thwart NATO enlargement. When Clinton came to support alliance expansion, however, Talbott fell into line with his friend and boss. As the example of Talbott shows, no single decision-making model offers all the answers.

Does the NATO expansion debate hold lessons for the future? Can the outcome be duplicated? Advocates of alliance enlargement think yes, and some are already pushing to have the April 1999 NATO summit include announcement of the next candidate members.¹⁸ When a second tranche is considered, the effectiveness of advocates' and opponents' arguments will depend upon such factors as how well the first tranche of new members has performed, the situation in Russia, the composition of the Senate, the personalities in the presidential administration, and the willingness of ethnic groups to go to bat for the next round of countries. Even if they draw all the right lessons from the first round of NATO expansion, advocates of further enlargement will have to work very hard, and be attuned to *all* the models of national security decision making, in order to repeat their achievement.

¹⁷Ibid

¹⁸Nowak

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